The example I’ll report on is one where the team involved has had limited success and the change team leader is me.

Using the D.V.F > R model from Beer & Spector (1994)there is nothing I could do, or would want to do to increase dissatisfaction more. Everyone involved is quite dissatisfied with the system for a plethora of reasons. The initiative to improve the system has made progress which came about through some degree of increased dissatisfaction as I asked an internal customer of the ailing system if they were happy with the product they were getting. They hadn’t really had the nerve to tell the internal supplier they didn’t like the product being supplied. Once the customer’s dissatisfaction was exposed cross functionally, the supplier was dissatisfied with the effect on their reputation and built a plan to
s l o w l y do better. I had to be careful, however, to not turn up the dissatisfaction too high. I still have to work with these resources.

Probably the best thing I could do is to increase vision, but after 8 years of a poorly resourced project with various people saying the system doesn’t work (When functionally it works just fine, it’s work practices around the system that don’t work.) I think any vision would be interpreted as just another batch of under resourced hope or hype.

In the beginning of this fix-the-bad-system project I used what I believed to be a good method of getting people on board by demanding from senior leaders that people from different functions get involved. But for several functions the initial team members didn’t see the value of participating for themselves and delegated the team member role to lower and lower levels within the organization until it rested with people who had no one to delegate too. I had every function list their frustrations with the system then we looked for commonalities to build a common vision of what to fix. We came up with a list of over 90 issues to address and began to prioritize them. The point was to have some first successful steps to build from. The cruel reality the team came up with was that we had resources to work on 4 of the 17 top priorities from the full list. With every team member having a more-than-full-time job, there wasn’t enough time, or willingness to sacrifice to work harder on this. Thus we’ve had sloth-like first steps, and we’ve even measured progress. After a year of working on four things, on one facet we’ve made 7% progress against the objective. Urgency is in short supply.

All that said, I think the D.V.F > R model is missing some things. Resources or right-people, then right tasks as Collins (2001) says, and urgency stated by Kotter (1996) are among them. While senior leaders at my company say the initiative reviewed above is important, they aren’t willing to give it a higher priority than other work. Thus we crawl toward success. The system is getting better utilized every day, at a glacial pace.

I recently found the change model below in a presentation at work. The original author was not cited there so I apologize to all that I don’t have a reference to cite in APA format. But I think its still worth looking at. This model shows five key things needed for leading complex changes and what happens if one element is missing:

Vision + skills + incentive + resources + action plan = effective change
skills + incentive + resources + action plan = confusion
Vision + incentive + resources + action plan = anxiety
Vision + skills + resources + action plan = gradual change
Vision + skills + incentive + action plan = frustration
Vision + skills + incentive + resources = false starts

Comparing my experience on the problem with this model I conclude that the five key things don’t have to be just present or absent. If you don’t have the elements in sufficient quantity you can have a project that moves forward, but exhibits ALL of the bad symptoms at some point.

References:

Collins, J. C., (2001). Good to great: Why some companies make the lead and others don’t. New York, HarperCollins.

Kotter, J. P., (1996). Leading change, Boston, Harvard Business School Press.

Spector, B., & Beer, M., (1994). Beyond TQM progarmmes. Journal of Organizational Change Management, 7(2), 63.